DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 239 704 JC 840 082

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TITLE Holistic Health and Cooperative Vocational Education (CVE) at the Community College Level.
PUB DATE 24 Apr 83
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Cooperative Education Association, Inc. (19th, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, April 24, 1983).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Cooperative Education; Exercise; *Holistic Approach; Meditation; Nutrition; Program Descriptions; *School Holding Power; Student Attrition; *Student Development; Two Year Colleges

ABSTRACT

Through cooperative education, not only do students gain exposure to instruction related to their vocational goal in the classroom and laboratory, but are also exposed to vocationally relevant instruction in the practical world of work. However, this combination of work and school can be very demanding and stressful, and students are often lacking in the basic lifestyle management skills that affect overall performance in personal, academic, and vocational situations. At Honolulu Community College, 31 of the 376 students participating in the cooperative education program withdrew from the program during 1980-81 due to loss in academic standing, job performance, or personal concerns. To reduce this attrition rate, the Cooperative Education Department initiated a Holistic Health and Cooperative Education Program which provided information and activities on stress reduction, exercise, nutrition, and ecology in addition to information on job seeking skills and the cooperative education process. Studies were conducted focusing on the anxiety levels and lifestyles of undeclared majors, associate in arts degree students, and the cooperative education students; and on the reactions of the holistic health students to the course. As a result of these studies, holistic health has become a regular part of the cooperative education program. (The study report includes information on exercise, nutrition, and meditation.) (LAL)

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HOLISTIC HEALTH AND COOPERATIVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (CVE)

AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL

A Paper For Presentation At The 1983

Cooperative Education Association, Inc. 19th Annual Conference

April 24, 1983

Toronto, Canada

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JC 840 082

HOLISTIC HEALTH AND COOPERATIVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION (CVE) AT THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEVEL

Cooperative education is the epitome of a reality based educational system. Not only do students gain exposure to instruction related to their vocational goal in the artificial environment of the classroom and laboratory, but they are also exposed to vocationally relevant instruction in the practical world of work. However, this combination of work and school can be very demanding and stressful. In addition, most students who are recommended by their instructor to participate in cooperative education have the necessary skills for entry level positions, but many of them are deficient in basic lifestyle management skills that affect overall performance in personal, academic and vocational situations. The total preparation of students for work is acknowledged to be often less than comprehensive. Accordingly, Ralph C. Porter (1982) supports the concept of an holistic or preventative approach for education so that the human resources needed by the community can be developed. Cooperative education, as a method of instruction which formally integrates a student's academic interests with productive work experience in community organizations, can be a central component in an educational process designed to support the community by developing the total student.

Employers from a wide variety of occupational fields agree (Lim, 1977) that in addition to entry level requirements, applicants need other basic qualities (motivation, honesty, personality and the ability to get along with others, alertness, positive attitude, appearance, reliability). If students are to successfully compete in today's highly technical and competitive job market, they need to maintain health and demonstrate ability in a variety of areas. However, stringent environmental demands can cause anxiety.

Anxiety can affect many aspects of behavior. High anxiety relates to a decline in overall health (Williams and Jones, 1968; Schonfield, 1975) including an increase in coronary heart disease (Segers, Graulich and Mertens, 1974; Otsfeld, Lebovits, Shekelle and Paul, 1964). Low self confidence plays a central role in the general anxiety pattern (Amerio, 1968; Nagel and Diespecker, 1973) and, academic behavior can be affected by anxiety. The criteria in learning and teaching research indicates that there is a relationship between high and low extremes of anxiety and learning (Fein, 1963; Nelson and Langer, 1965; Schwab and Iverson, 1964) which indicate that students who demonstrate high or low levels of anxiety have a greater incidence of dropping out or failing. Students who are anxious and in poor health are more liable to have difficulties at work as well, lowering ability to function under stress.

Hans Selye (1974) defines physiological stress as the nonspecific response to any demand made on the body. Whether positive or negative, the body activates its defenses in order to fight or avoid the stressor (cause of stress). It is this physical response to stress that can be harmful if it occurs too often (as is quite common in a highly technical society).

The principle effects of stress (Bloomfield and Kory, 1978) include the following:

1. Chronic elevation of blood pressure with slow but steady damage to heart, kidneys and cardiovascular system.
2. Increasing blood clots and tearing arterial walls.
3. Increasing blood sugar level which raises cholesterol levels, contributing to strokes and cardiovascular disease.
4. Lowering resistance to disease by reducing white blood cell levels.
5. Increasing stomach acidity which contributes to ulcer formation.

6. Increasing inflammation in joints, aches and pains, and chronic arthritis.
7. Increasing overall body hyperactivity which results in exhaustion, fatigue and insomnia.

According to Ken Duchwald, author of Bodymind, stress is stored unconsciously in the system and can only be released by one of the following: learning to move in a new way, manipulation, and meditation. Wellness is also promoted when one obtains the appropriate kind and amount of nutrients and exercise. (Specific information on these topics is included in the ACTIVITIES section.)

In Hawaii, during the 1980-1981 academic year, thirty-one (8%) of the students (N=376) were unable to complete their cooperative education program at Honolulu Community College. Withdrawal from the program was due to loss in academic standing, job performance or personal concerns. Therefore, the Cooperative Education department sought an alternative method of service. During the 1981-1982 academic year, the holistic health and Cooperative Education program was initiated. Holistic health implies a growth process in the areas of physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual development (McCamy and Presley, 1975). The emphasis is on wellness and preventative health rather than on the negative affects of disease. Wellness (Bauman, Brint, Piper, Wright, 1978) is a process that begins when a person sees himself/herself as a growing, changing entity, unified in mind, body and spirit. Correspondingly, the holistic model applied to cooperative education consists of providing information and activities on stress reduction, exercise, nutrition and ecology in addition to information on job seeking skills and the cooperative education process.

The overall goal of the holistic health and Cooperative Education program was to improve student self concept so as to overcome student perceived obsta-

cles to job placement. Completion rate would naturally increase as a result. The following objectives were established:

1. To promote student self help skills through individual and group sessions.
2. To provide activities and information on stress reduction, exercise, nutrition and ecology.
3. To provide information on job seeking skills and to assist students to obtain productive employment in an area related to their academic interests.
4. To monitor students on the job throughout the work period in order to troubleshoot problems that may occur, act as a liaison between the employer and the instructional faculty, and to evaluate the students' performance and training on the job.

Population

Of the four hundred and seventeen students who enrolled in cooperative education during the 1981-1982 academic year, all were enrolled in a curriculum leading to either an Associate in Science or an Associate in Arts degree, pursuing a major field related to the occupation for which they were hired. They ranged in age from eighteen to forty-four with an average of twenty. Thirty-one percent were female and sixty-nine percent were male. Student ethnicity included thirty percent caucasian, forty-six percent Asian American, sixteen percent Pacific Islanders, and eight percent from other groups. All students graduated from high school (or the equivalent).

Procedure

A study was conducted to determine the level of anxiety experienced by the student population. Equal numbers of students were randomly selected from each of the following groups: 1) students attending school who had not declared a

major field of study, 2) students pursuing an Associate in Arts degree, and 3) students pursuing an Associate in Science degree who were also participating in the Cooperative Education program. Students (N=69) were requested to complete a self report inventory consisting of the Anxiety Scale Questionnaire (ASQ) and questions about lifestyle using the same format. The sequence of tests was varied between groups to control for fatigue since administration time was longer than for the ASQ alone.

The IPAT ASQ was selected because norm groups for college students are available, and because it was designed to provide a single anxiety score in a relatively short period of time (15 min). Reliability of the ASQ was determined from averaging thirteen test-retest study results. The standard error of measurement is approximately three raw score points or .5 stens. In other words, about two thirds of the time, the individual's "true" anxiety score will fall within three raw score points or within one-half sten of the obtained score. Validity of the ASQ has been analyzed using three independent methods. The evidence of a number of factor analytic investigations, from studies of clinically assessed anxiety, and from other questionnaire measures of anxiety converges to the conclusion that the validity of the ASQ approaches .90.

An Holistic Health and Employment course was developed and offered for the first time during the Spring semester of 1982. This course was designed to meet the special concerns of students who intend to work while in school. The major focus of the class was on lifestyle management, attitude, job seeking skills and job maintenance behaviors. The majority of students who enrolled in this elective course had not declared an academic major, and were as yet undecided in terms of vocational goal or academic major. The intention of this course was to prepare students in advance for the challenge of cooperative education. With this preparation, they could behave more effectively at that time.

Finally, the Cooperative Education department provided coop students with information and activities on lifestyle management in addition to individual and group orientation sessions designed to facilitate the student's progress.

Results

The results of the ASQ indicated that there was a difference between groups with regard to anxiety. Sixty-five percent of the coop students scored within a normal range of anxiety (sten score 4 - 7) while the AA student's group had fifty-two percent and the Undecided group had forty-five percent. The AA program had the lowest percentage of students in the Overly Relaxed category (9%) while coop had thirteen percent and the Undecided students had eighteen percent. AA program students and Undecided students tended to be much more anxious (scoring 39 and 36 percent respectively) while coop students had seventeen percent.

Analysis of student responses to the Wellness Inventory indicated that students who maintained balanced lifestyle habits tended to perform more consistently and efficiently than other students. There also appears to be a relationship between length of practice and effect. Students who have practiced holistic techniques for over one year tend to score in the normal range of anxiety and tend to achieve academic as well as vocational goals as compared to other students.

A follow-up study determined the number of continuing students in the study who failed to enroll at the College during the Fall semester of 1982. In the AA group, four out of eleven (36%) "at risk" students dropped out compared to six out of twelve (60%) in the "normal level"". In the undecided group, two out of twelve (17%) "at risk" students dropped out compared to six out of ten (60%) in the normal level. In the Cooperative Education group, only one out of eight (13%) of the "at risk" students dropped out compared to one out of fifteen (7%) in the "normal level".

Results of this study indicate that Cooperative Education students generally have a greater chance of completing their career and academic goals than other students attending a community college, although there is no conclusive evidence to indicate that students who score in the "at risk" category have a greater chance of dropping out of school than those who score in the normal range. In addition, lifestyle habits affect both short term and long term performance.

Student reactions to the holistic model indicated an improvement in attitude and life style management skills. Completion rate for the 1981-1982 academic year was 96% (compared to 92% the previous year). Further investigation is indicated to determine additional methods of disseminating information and resulting effects of this technique. As a result of this project, students, employers, and college staff have benefited, and holistic health has become a regular part of the cooperative education program.

ACTIVITIES

Exercise

Exercise is an essential component in any program designed to facilitate wellness. There are two types of exercise that have proved to be necessary for health. The first type involves the large muscles and stimulates the cardiovascular system. Any activity that requires continuous movement of the large muscles for a period of 15-30 minutes, three times a week (swimming, jogging, brisk walking, etc.) qualifies. The second type of exercise improves circulation and stretches the muscles for flexibility. Excellent examples of stretching exercise include yoga, Tai Chin Chuan, ballet, etc. However, before attempting a new activity, one's physician should be consulted.

Our everyday movements are habitual and often unconscious. Therefore, it is not possible to relieve unconsciously stored stress in our regular day to

day activities. Our bodies move according to the strengths and weaknesses which have accumulated over time, creating habitual patterns of movement that can only be altered through systematic and disciplined techniques. Each person can find an appropriate technique through the process of experimentation. A successful technique is one that the individual will perform regularly and will begin to move in a new, more balanced way as a result.

Nutrition

Good eating habits based on moderation and variety contribute to wellness. Generally, healthy individuals (some diseases and conditions may interfere with normal nutrition) benefit from: eating a variety of foods; maintaining an ideal weight; avoiding too much fat, saturated fat, and cholesterol; eating foods with adequate starch and fiber (fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains); avoiding too much sugar and sodium; eliminating preservatives; and curbing negative health habits (such as consumption of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, etc.).

In addition to the above recommendations, there are certain limitations to the efficiency of our digestive enzymes. Proper food combining can enhance the nutritional value of food and provide protection against poisoning. Protein combines well with vegetables (lettuce, kale, spinach, parsely, celery, sprouts, broccoli, asparagus, onion, artichoke and cucumber). A complete vegetarian protein can be obtained by eating a combination of whole grains, seeds and nuts, and legumes. However, combining different types of animal protein affects the acid balance necessary for pepsin (the protein digester) to operate. Similarly, fruits inhibit production of hydrochloric acid necessary for the digestion of other types of foods. Melon, in particular, is one of the most easily digested foods. If melon is eaten with any other food, it is held up in the stomach and quickly decomposes and ferments. Starch (beets; potatoes; root vegetables; carrots; parsnips; refined breads,

pastas, crackers, etc.) combines well only with vegetables and should not be eaten with protein or fruits. Milk, because it is high in protein and fat, stimulates the secretion of pepsin and rennen which coagulate the milk. Coagulated particles insulate other foods from gastric juices by clinging to them. Consequently, drink milk alone. In addition, since digestion time varies from approximately 1½ to 4 hours, one should allow at least three hours before attempting a new combination.

Meditation

Meditation simply means to focus the mind. One meditates to drive a car, eat breakfast, or to take a bath. The fruit of the meditation is obtained: the destination is reached, hunger is satiated, and the body is cleansed. If one turns the focus of the mind inwards, with the intention of contacting the essential energy within one's own self (the essential inner Self) then, that goal will also be attained. The mind is strong and willful, always wanting to be active. Consequently, a tool is helpful to aid the mind. One very effective tool for meditation on the inner Self is a mantra (combination of sounds). The power of sound can be demonstrated by the effect of soothing music, thunder in a rain storm, or someone yelling "SHARK" in the water. Four thousand years ago, the masters of the Siddha Yoga lineage studied sounds in the Sanskrit language to develop mantras which would be effective in meditation. One of the oldest texts of Kashmir Shavism is called the Vijnana Bhairava, and it details the science of hamsa (the soham breath sound). This text and mantra are described in detail in the book, I Am That, by Swami Muktananda. Swami Muktananda has developed a reputation around the world as a Siddha or great being who has mastered all forms of yoga (which means unity between the individual and universal self). He suggests that in order to benefit from the technique of meditation, several considerations must be made. First, identify a place in your home that you can reserve for meditation. A corner in a quiet

room is best. Fold a wool blanket or drape a silk scarf on the carpet or on a flat pillow to sit on. The material will store your energy.

Close your eyes and sit quietly. Listen to the sound of the breath as it comes in and as it goes out very naturally. As your breath comes in, it makes the sound HAM. As your breath goes out, it makes the sound SO. Soham is the natural breath sound. It means "I am That"...inner Self, and it repeats itself constantly within you as you breathe.

In this technique, the breath sound is not so important. The most important thing is the space between breaths. The space between breaths is the space of the Self. Become aware of the space between breaths.

If one practices this technique regularly (15 minutes in the morning before breakfast and 15 minutes in the afternoon before dinner) thoughts disappear and eventually even the mantra will disappear. Then, the individual will become like the wave that has returned to the ocean, merging with the essential energy, the inner Self...pure consciousness. After obtaining this level of relaxation, one can perform more effectively throughout the day while maintaining a positive attitude, irregardless of the environmental situation.

This simple technique is an effective means of improving concentration, relieving stress, and achieving wellness (Benson and Klipper, 1975). It also enables one to experience the ultimate source of knowledge, love and happiness (J.C. Pearce, 1971; M.T. Kelsey, 1976; Muktananda, 1974).

Meditation is universal. It does not belong to any particular group, rather, it belongs to everyone. Meditation is not a religion, it is a technique. Therefore, it does not interfere with any true religious teachings. As a process occuring within each individual, it naturally encompasses all philosophies, through the direct experience of love, knowledge and bliss.

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